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SUBJECT: TULKAREM -- IMPROVED SECURITY, BUT NO SIGN OF
ECONOMIC DIVIDEND

Classified By: A/PO Greg Marchese for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary. In a September 16 visit to Tulkarem, ConGenOffs heard from Palestinian refugees and business leaders that, while security has improved in the city, the local economy is struggling and has not benefited from any easing of internal movement, unlike other West Bank communities. With the Israeli labor market -- formerly the primary economic driver in Tulkarem -- no longer accessible due to the separation barrier, unemployment is as high as 35 percent, and even higher among refugees. While all interlocutors supported PM Fayyad's initiatives, refugee leaders claimed that their impact has not reached the average Palestinian farmer or laborer. End Summary.

Improved Security, but a Struggling Economy

12. (C) In separate September 16 meetings, Palestinian refugee leaders in Tulkarem Camp and Tulkarem business leaders described a noticeable improvement in security. Camp Services Officer Mohammed Haykal, who is responsible for managing UNRWA's health and education programs for the roughly 35,000 refugees living in and around the camp, said that PA security forces are "doing fine," although the IDF does not allow them to operate after dark and nightly IDF incursions into Tulkarem continue. Residents would feel better if the IDF coordinated operations with the PA, he added.

13. (C) Refugees and business leaders alike asserted, however, that improved security has not translated into economic growth. Unlike Nablus and Ramallah, Tulkarem's economy had previously depended on Palestinian laborers commuting to Israel. Several refugee camp committee members said they remain unemployed after losing their jobs inside Israel due to the separation barrier. Business leaders at the Tulkarem Chamber of Commerce reported that unemployment now hovers at 35 percent, and that the current number of Israeli work permits (around 1,500) is far below the pre-second intifada level of 14,000. Additionally, much of Tulkarem's agricultural land is in the "seam zone" between the separation barrier and the Green Line, making it inaccessible, they said.

14. (C) Although Arab Israelis can now enter Tulkarem, road blocks along the access route and the Enav checkpoint have turned a five-minute trip between Israel and Tulkarem into at least a one-hour drive. Most Arab Israelis just go to Nablus, they said. Businessman and trader Radwan Hamza also noted the short hours at the commercial crossing (8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m., no new trucks after 3:00 p.m.) as an impediment to trade with Israel. Zaid Uthman, owner of Fleafel Textile Co., said that he had established a company in Israel, uses Israeli-plated trucks to transport his

containerized goods door to door, and labels his products "Made in Israel" in order to overcome these obstacles. "What do you expect from the occupation," he scolded his colleagues, "you must adapt!"

Support for PM Fayyad, but Impact is Limited

15. (C) Among the refugee leaders, there was widespread support for PM Fayyad's government and his initiatives to improve rule of law and governance. Haykal characterized Tulkarem Camp as pro-Fatah, with only 10-20 percent supporting Hamas. However, he said, "we are frustrated and indifferent" since the PA has not stepped forward to help Palestinians living in the camps. Meanwhile, poverty in the camp is rampant, with nearly everyone who is not a PA or UNRWA employee receiving UNRWA emergency assistance. UNRWA's efforts to attract 7th-9th grade students to school on Saturday for remedial education and recreation face the pressure on children to earn wages on their days off. UNRWA's four schools in Tulkarem also face some of the highest dropout rates in the West Bank.

16. (C) The Popular Camp Committee Chairman, Faisal Salameh, who was also a delegate to the August 2009 Fatah Congress, hoped that the U.S. would continue to support PM Fayyad, but said that "farmers and workers" have not benefited from his government. "We don't want economic peace. We need a political solution," he added.

Comment

JERUSALEM 00001715 002 OF 002

17. (C) Salameh's remarks reflect a common theme in the camps. While some refugee leaders have told us they are glad that the camps were included for the first time ever in national planning via PM Fayyad's 2007 Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP), and reiterated in Fayyad's two-year state-building plan, they express frustration and disappointment that this has not been translated into action. They often unfavorably compare their situation with that of refugees in Jordan and Syria where national governments often provide water and sewage infrastructure and roads in the camps.

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